

holders on an average account for only two Ibex per annum, and those are 'Saddle-backs', i.e., old males, of doubtful utility for breeding purposes.

It would be interesting to know how Ibex are faring in other hill ranges of the South—the Anaimalais, Palnis, High Range, etc. Perhaps our members could give information.

KALHATTI,
NILGIRIS,
June 14, 1955.

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10. THE FAMILY LIFE OF A FIVE-STRIPED SQUIRREL— (*FUNAMBULUS PENNANTI* WR.)

In 1953 October I found a young squirrel by the wayside which had dropped from her nest. The crow and the kite had missed her. I reared her on warm milk which she sucked from a piece of cotton dipped in it, and then gradually as she grew up she fended for herself but still insisted on a daily ration of delicacies such as top of the milk, coffee and sweets. I have watched her make a dash for a resting honey-bee or a fly and devour it with relish, wings and all.

By June 1954 she was full grown and had a wooden box lined with cottonwool in which she slept at night. This box of hers was kept in a small almirah built in the wall. To come out in the open she had to jump on to the frigidaire, then on to a curtain, rope-dance along a wire to another almirah, and finally come down by the wire-meshed door on to the courtyard. There was an easier route along the casing but it never seemed to appeal to her.

On June 8, 1954 while I was immersed in a book, my pet squirrel came into the room and sat on the top of the door. The next moment she gave one of the sweetest calls I have ever heard, followed by a second and a third call, at short intervals. There was an answering call at a distance, not as musical though certainly appealing. The calls became more frequent and more in number as they came nearer, and it seemed to me they were far too many to belong to one since there was such a wide range and variety in pitch. Bewildered, I peeped out from behind the curtains on to the courtyard, and imagine my surprise when I saw trooping down the stairs of our double storeyed house, not one, not two, but as many as eight squirrels of different shapes and sizes. One was certainly old and tottering, another with just half a tail, and a third sleek and debonair. For the first time I realized that the female of the species takes the initiative to let the squirrel world know that she is ready. But one factor, I am certain she had not bargained for, was the terrific onslaught that followed, because the next moment she was hotly pursued up the casing, down the curtain and behind the couch. The suitors fought among themselves for supremacy, but for her there was a constant urgent appeal in the voice as each pursued her. Finally at an opportune moment the debonair suitor, handsomest of the lot, softening her by his coaxing call, quickly caught her in a

clasp and mated. She struggled at first to unloosen the grasp, and on failing to do so, submitted quietly. For about 15 minutes they remained thus until disturbed by another inquisitive squirrel. The female squirrel came to life as it were, and with a turning bite freed herself and ran, followed closely behind by the surprised mate. He caught her up again but now she was not unwilling. They mated a third time in the course of the day and quietly, because the other squirrels had quit the field, so to say.

The love life of a squirrel lasts but just one day. The next and the following days not a single squirrel could be seen, nor did the female send out her urgent calls again. Alone and unaided she makes her nest and rears her young, the male being but a day's visitor.

Soon after, she brought in strips of cloth, a ball of thread she had managed to slip out of the sewing bowl, and finally, unseen by me, a handkerchief of mine to line her already lined wooden box. Before long she turned plump and round, and on the morning of July 18, exactly one month and ten days after mating, she came out of her box as slim as ever. I was certain she had been delivered the night before, and I was keen to see the litter. She who was such a pet to let me handle her became so possessive that she turned ferociously on me the moment I went up to her almirah. Outside it she let me feed her.

That night tragedy overtook her family. Early next morning I was surprised to find her, not in the box suckling her young ones, but constantly getting in and out of the box. She was letting out the most pathetic squeaks, and she would not allow me to find out what was wrong. Unable to stand her sorrow any longer I drove her out of the almirah and out on to the courtyard and locked the doors. I took down the box and looked in and only then could I understand the cause of her pain, for it shook me to find just a few pieces of meat, the remnants of her first-born.

I threw out her nest, cleaned the box thoroughly, aired it and put fresh cotton wool for her, then let the doors be opened. She went straight for the almirah, and finding her old nest and everything thrown away, went on with her squeaks that were nothing less than wailings for her lost litter. Fortunately she calmed down by late evening and was normal the next morning. I was still wondering who had destroyed her family when I heard a commotion. On entering the room I saw a huge sewer rat on the casing and my pet squirrel appealing for help at the top of her voice. Then it struck me that these rats enter homes during monsoons when their own burrows fill with rain water. The night before, he had come down the casing, found the almirah open, frightened the mother squirrel out of the box and then had made a meal of the young ones. I learnt my first lesson. Since then I close the doors of the almirah at night and open them early every morning.

Within a fortnight of that tragedy my squirrel had so recovered that she again advertised the fact that she was ready for her suitors. On August 5, 1954 she went through the whole drama of June 8, but I cannot tell for certain whether the mate she chose the second time was the same as the first, because there is no way to tell them

one from another unless there is a tail missing. This time they mated twice in the course of the day, and on each occasion for a longer period, 20 minutes at a time.

On September 16 she turned ferocious again, and when I went to feed her she ran down the almirah, up my dress, took hold of my middle finger, gave a sharp nip and went back to her box. I looked foolishly at my bleeding finger, and learnt my second lesson. Now, every time she becomes a mother I give her the widest possible berth.

The first thing she did each morning was to leave the nest for half an hour for fresh air, food and exercise. I took that opportunity to peep in, and found three very small, blind and absolutely hairless young ones. To suckle those fast growing, hungry mouths the mother squirrel had to have ample milk in her four teats, so that now she consumed double her normal diet with short intervals between feeds. When once full she went to suckle her young ones until they slept on a full stomach. Then she would come out of the box and keep watch, stretched out on the lid, and there take forty winks herself.

In three weeks their eyes opened, squirrel markings appeared on their now furry backs, and it was at this stage that I took one of the litter to bring up myself. When the two young ones grew in size and the box became uncomfortable for suckling, the mother would bring them out of the box, and in the almirah curl herself like a dog while the young ones held furiously on to the teats. Even when they could fend for themselves they would insist on being breast-fed now and then, and the mother made no objection.

Gradually she brought them out and taught them the way to the courtyard, but there was always a fall or two when the mother would show remarkable patience. On one occasion I watched her from 12 in the afternoon to 8 at night trying to induce a young one back into the almirah after he had accidentally fallen out through sheer inquisitiveness. With her success I learnt my third lesson, that perseverance knows no failure.

The moment she taught them to go free she refused to have them in the box, though out in the courtyard she fondled them once or twice. One great difficulty I came up against was that I could not freely bring up the young I took from her box. She refused to recognise her offspring because the human hand had obliterated the original smell and she would chase him about and bite, with the result that to this day I have failed to bring up a single young one. Invariably she would so chase them about that the ones she reared as well as the one I brought up would disappear, thinking it better to live a squirrel's life of freedom than a dog's life in a courtyard!

One characteristic that I noted in my squirrel was that she spurned male attention while the young ones suckled. I have seen the male making advances with soft calls, but she would turn round, attack and so chase him that he thought it wiser to run for his life and leave the territory in her possession.

The moment she showed hard-heartedness towards her own offspring I knew she was getting ready to bring up another family. Thus on December 4, 1954 she conceived for the third time and one

month and twelve days later brought into the world, a litter of three on January 16, 1955.

I do not know if squirrels are as prolific in the wild state as in captivity, because on March 10, she mated again and gave birth on April 20, 1955 to three young ones, her fourth litter.

One from this litter I brought up, and one day when he was alone he went to investigate a table fan in motion. Fortunately, I had just come into the room to find him on the ground twitching his legs, and the nose was bleeding. Quickly I took him up and sat through the whole afternoon rubbing his nose and body with ice while he lay limp in the palm of my hand, whimpering. That night I just could not put him down fearing to find him stiff and cold the next morning. I lay under the starlit sky with the injured body against my heart to keep it warm, and time and again my hand felt for its heart-beat. For the next two days he was in a comatose condition taking very little milk, and that little with great difficulty, but from the third day onwards he recovered enough to lead a normal life.

There was certainly a slight concussion of the brain, for he walked in circles and had lost the use of one hand. In spite of this he flourished but his mother gave him no peace and chased him up and down. One day I lost my temper and drove her out of the house though I knew she was carrying, for she had for the fifth time mated on June 15, 1955. In retaliation she too refused the hospitality of the house, and for the first time made a nest for her future litter in a crevice of a wall in the compound next to ours. In the meantime the maimed youngster, a month after his accident, vanished into thin air. He chose the road to freedom.

Now and then I would see my squirrel come to the courtyard for food since her hunger had sharpened as her days were drawing nearer the delivery. Then on July 26, 1955 she came down slim and famished, a proud mother again. She ate voraciously, then went through her box which had not been removed, and returned to her young ones. She came every day for her ration, investigated her almirah and then went back.

Then came a terrific downpour lasting two days and I hoped that the mother would see sense and not let pride ruin her litter. On August 17, 1955 during a brief respite from rain I looked up to see the mother coming down the stairs with her young held by the nape of the neck. She dropped her burden in the box and made trip after trip bringing her litter of three, and the nest as well.

Yesterday, August 19, I took a young one out, and while I was typing this article he started bawling for milk bringing the mother down to investigate! She coolly looked at me, came to my lap, sniffed at her offspring and lay down to suckle him. When he was full she rolled him into a ball, gathered him up and carried him back to her box while I sat and watched, and inside me there was such peace and happiness that I decided to let her keep her family.

SUNNY VIEW,
SAHARANPUR, U.P.
August 29, 1955.

(MRS.) ARUNA BANERJI